

Message Text

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SUBJECT: SITUATION OF THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE IN
ISTANBUL

REF: (A) ATHENS 1259, (B) ISTANBUL 0401, (C) ISTANBUL 0250,
(D) STATE 010629, (E) 77 ISTANBUL 3871, (F) 77 STATE 269693

FOR YOUR INFORMATION, THERE FOLLOWS THE TEXT OF THE LETTER
DEPARTMENT IS CURRENTLY USING TO RESPOND TO CONGRESSIONAL
AND PRIVATE INQUIRIES CONCERNING THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE
AND OTHER GREEK ORTHODOX PROBLEMS IN ISTANBUL.

A. QUOTE: THANK YOU FOR YOUR LETTER CONCERNING THE TURKISH
GOVERNMENT'S ALLEGED VIOLATION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS AND
RELIGIOUS FREEDOM OF THE GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH AND GREEK
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COMMUNITY IN ISTANBUL.

B. AT THE REQUEST OF THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, THE AMERICAN
CONSULATE GENERAL IN ISTANBUL HAS CONTINUED TO MONITOR THESE
MATTERS AND HAS RECENTLY REPORTED THAT CURRENT ISSUES IN
THE GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH'S RELATIONS WITH THE TURKISH
GOVERNMENT PRIMARILY CENTER ON: (A) TAXATION OF PROPERTY

OF GREEK ORTHODOX PRIVATE SCHOOLS AND (B) DENIAL OF PASS-
PORTS TO CHURCH OFFICIALS.

C. WITH REGARD TO TAXATION OF PROPERTY OF GREEK ORTHODOX PRIVATE SCHOOLS, THE CONSULATE GENERAL REPORTED THAT ALL PRIVATE SCHOOLS IN ISTANBUL, INCLUDING THOSE GIVING INSTRUCTION IN FRENCH AND ENGLISH AS WELL AS IN GREEK, ARE CONCERNED OVER THE PROPERTY TAX QUESTION. BECAUSE OF THE LARGE SIZE OF GREEK ORTHODOX PROPERTY HOLDINGS, MANY OF WHICH ARE HIGHLY DESIRABLE COMMERCIAL SITES IN HIGH TAX AREAS, SUCH TAXATION POSES A PARTICULARLY DIFFICULT PROBLEM. THE REDUCED POPULATION OF THE GREEK COMMUNITY IN ISTANBUL--NOW NUMBERING AROUND 10,000 PERSONS--HAS ALSO IMPAIRED ITS FINANCIAL ABILITY TO MAINTAIN ITS EXTENSIVE BUT UNDER-UTILIZED INSTITUTIONAL PROPERTIES. WE UNDERSTAND, FOR EXAMPLE, THAT THERE ARE 35 PRIVATE GREEK SCHOOLS IN ISTANBUL, BUT THE GREEK COMMUNITY'S STUDENT POPULATION IS ONLY ABOUT 1,000. AS OF FEBRUARY 8, THE CONSULATE GENERAL WAS NOT AWARE THAT ANY OF THESE INSTITUTIONS HAS RECENTLY BEEN CLOSED. SOME OF THE SMALLER SCHOOLS ARE APPARENTLY KEPT OPEN IN ORDER TO MAINTAIN THEIR STATUS AS PRIVATE NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS ENTITLED TO PREFERENTIAL TAX TREATMENT. ALTHOUGH ALL PRIVATE SCHOOLS IN TURKEY ARE REQUIRED TO PAY PROPERTY TAX, WE UNDERSTAND THAT SOME GREEK SCHOOLS NEVERTHELESS HAVE BEEN EXEMPTED FROM SUCH TAX.

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D. CONCERNING THE ISSUE OF RESTRICTIONS ON FOREIGN TRAVEL BY MEMBERS OF THE GREEK COMMUNITY, THE CONSULATE GENERAL HAS REPORTED THAT WITH THE EXCEPTION OF A FEW MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH HIERARCHY, FREEDOM OF TRAVEL FOR THE GREEK MINORITY IN TURKEY IS IN GENERAL UNRESTRICTED. TURKISH CITIZENS OF GREEK ORIGIN APPEAR TO TRAVEL IN AND OUT OF TURKEY AND TO EMIGRATE WITH NO APPARENT DISTINCTION BETWEEN THEM AND OTHER TURKS. THERE ARE REPORTS, HOWEVER, THAT IN RECENT MONTHS THE GOVERNMENT OF TURKEY DID NOT ISSUE TRAVEL DOCUMENTS TO CERTAIN GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH PRELATES. WHILE METROPOLITAN MELITON, A RANKING PRELATE WHO WAS ONE OF SEVERAL PATRIARCHATE OFFICIALS WHO HAD BEEN UNABLE TO OBTAIN PERMISSION TO TRAVEL, RECEIVED A PASSPORT LATE LAST FALL, IT HAS BEEN REPORTED THAT THREE OTHER GREEK ORTHODOX METROPOLITANS HAVE NOT BEEN GIVEN PASSPORTS. IT APPEARS, HOWEVER, THAT THIS MATTER MAY NOW BE ON THE WAY TO RESOLUTION.

E. ON FEBRUARY 9, WHILE ENROUTE BACK TO ISTANBUL, METROPOLITAN MELITON MADE THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT TO THE ATHENS PRESS:

"THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE IS NOT IN DANGER. AS FAR AS I KNOW, THE TURKISH STATE HAS NO INTENTION OF ENDANGERING THE POSITION OF THE PATRIARCHATE BECAUSE THAT WOULD NOT SERVE TURKEY'S INTERESTS. OF COURSE, THERE ARE SERIOUS

PROBLEMS BETWEEN THE PATRIARCHATE AND THE TURKISH GOVERNMENT. PROBLEMS ALSO EXIST BETWEEN THE GREEK MINORITY AND THE TURKISH GOVERNMENT. HOWEVER, WE WISH TO SOLVE SUCH PROBLEMS BY MEANS OF A DIALOGUE WITH THE TURKISH GOVERNMENT WITHOUT FOREIGN INTERFERENCE. OUR WISH AS A PATRIARCHATE, AND A MOTHER CHURCH, IS TO SEE GREEK-TURKISH CONTACT BEAR FRUIT IN ORDER TO SERVE THE MORE SUBSTANTIVE INTERESTS OF BOTH PEOPLES."

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F. PRIME MINISTER ECEVIT HAS INDICATED THAT HE SEEKS TO RESOLVE OUTSTANDING ISSUES BETWEEN GREECE ANY TURKEY AND HAS SHOWN INTEREST IN THE PROBLEMS OF THE GREEK ORTHODOX PATRIARCHATE IN ISTANBUL.

G. THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE AND THE AMERICAN CONSULATE GENERAL IN ISTANBUL WILL CONTINUE TO FOLLOW THIS MATTER CLOSELY. END QUOTE.

DEPARTMENT APPRECIATES TIMELY AND FULL REPORTING ON THIS SUBJECT WHICH HAS BEEN VERY HELFFUL IN DEALING WITH INQUIRIES TO DATE. WOULD APPRECIATE CONTINUED REPORTING ON SUBJECT AS DEVELOPMENTS WARRANT. CHRISTOPHER

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